

## THE NON-RESISTANCE PRINCIPLE.

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ALTHOUGH, in my judgment, the enterprise of John Brown in Virginia fell short, in one particular, of conformity to the highest rule of life, admitting a mixture of evil among the instruments and processes by which he undertook to overcome evil, still, I must regard and characterize that enterprise as a noble one; noble in its spirit and purpose towards the enslaved, and in its self-sacrificing and persevering devotion to their cause, and noble also in the openness and directness with which he confronted the Slave Power in their defence. In these latter particulars, John Brown, really feeling for those in bonds "*as bound with them*," was unspeakably in advance, not only of the Church and the State in general, but of their most advanced ranks: both of the voters for the Massachusetts "Personal Liberty Bill," and of the far smaller and more timid number who formed the "Church Anti-Slavery Society." It was inevitable that such a man, seeing the miserable inadequacy of both these movements, should utterly refuse coöperation with them. It is equally inevitable that his heroic character, which extorted admiration and respect even from slaveholders, should stimulate many Northern men to a discharge of the duty of active interference for the release of the slaves; and that his elaborate provision of deadly weapons, and his readiness to use them against any assailants of his freed-men, should put many upon considering whether such use be not justifiable; whether self-defence, which seems a natural instinct and a natural right, may not properly be conducted in this manner; and whether the de-

fence of others, especially of the *most* wronged and the *most* helpless, may not be carried on with equal energy, and the use of the same instruments.

This state of things naturally brings before many minds the principle briefly called Non-Resistance, with speculations in regard to its reasonableness and obligation. Since this subject, always important, is now especially needful and timely, and since very erroneous ideas prevail in regard to it, I will contribute my mite towards the answering of these questions.

Self-defence not only seems, but *is*, a natural instinct and a natural right; and the same may be asserted of the defence, not only of our friends and neighbors, but of every human being whom we see wronged, and have power to help; and this is preëminently true of those unfortunate fellow-creatures who are *most* wronged and outraged, within the reach of our aid. Nobody doubts, nobody ever questioned, that it is a good and a right thing to avert injury from ourselves and others.

The question next arises — Am I to do this right and desirable thing, the averting of injury from myself or others, by the use of any means, indifferently? by the readiest and most convenient instrument, irrespective of all other considerations?

If, travelling in a barbarous country, (say Virginia,) I am threatened with violence as an Abolitionist, may I lie to secure my escape?

If my friend, arraigned under an unjust law, or on an erroneous charge, asks me to be his bail, may I, to do him ~~this kindness~~, falsely swear myself to be possessed of the needful amount of property?

If my mercantile credit, dear to me as life, is imperilled by the want of money at a critical moment, may I resort to theft or forgery to avert this danger?

If a case at law, involving both my personal reputation and the subsistence of my wife and children, is sure to be decided against me through the testimony of a particular witness, may I kill him? may I even kidnap him, and keep him a prisoner?

The consideration of cases like these will show us that there are some acts which may not be done even in self-

defence; and a little further reflection will make it plain, that since the rules of right and wrong, the principles of morality and religion, remain quite undisturbed by our private exigency, such exigency does not at all release us from obedience to them; and that, therefore, we are limited in self-defence, as in all the other transactions of our lives, to the use of means and instrumentalities that are *right*.

To say otherwise would be to reverse the verdict of the world and of our own consciousness, in some of the most honored examples that history has given us. It is universally allowed that Aristides did well to adhere to that justice which caused his banishment; that Socrates was wise in pursuing the very course which brought him to the fatal hemlock; that Shadrach was right in refusing to worship the golden image, even in sight of the burning fiery furnace; and that Luther did nobly in the persistent declaration, even when ruin seemed about to overwhelm him — "Here I stand! I can do no other!"

Do *our* true wisdom and safety lie in any different path from that taken by these men? Must not *we*, too, in any exigency which may befall us, find what measures of defence are permitted us by first asking — What is right? I will assume it to be settled that we must do so.

The next question is — How shall we ascertain what is right?

All sorts of different authorities are appealed to by different people on this subject. The Catholic will point you to "the church" (meaning *the clergy*) for direction; the Protestant, to the Bible; one man, to the law of honor; another, to public sentiment; a third, to the law of the land; and a fourth, to the "higher law," or the "inner light." Each man must necessarily decide this point for himself, since, before he can *follow* either of these rules, or any other, he must first have *chosen* that one, and rejected the rest.

I choose, as my rule, Christianity; by which I mean the rule of living which Jesus of Nazareth summed up in these two provisions: to love God with the whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves; defining our neighbor to be any one who is in need that we can relieve — illustrating the nature of love by showing that it should be *practical* in its operation, and should include even our enemies — further explaining

that this love must have a constant and active energy in reforming the world, *overcoming* its evil, and overcoming it *with good* — and emphatically enjoining that all good shall be cherished and all evil overcome in each man's own heart and life, as well as in the world around him.

I choose this rule simply because it is the best that I can find, or conceive of. It seems to me perfect, adapted in the most thorough manner to secure the progressive improvement, the welfare, and thus the happiness, of the human race. If, however, you choose a different rule, very likely you will disagree with my conclusions. What I am now concerned to show is, that my rule, (above stated,) the Christian rule, requires that the law of love should regulate our overcoming of evil as well as every other department of our action, and this equally, whether the evil in question is directed against ourselves or others. I trust that thus far the case is plain.

Here, then, are the laws which are to regulate our action against evil-doers, whether the thing assailed be our individual welfare, or the individual welfare of a "neighbor," or the general welfare of the community.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF!

LOVE EVEN YOUR ENEMIES!

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD!

Let us make the application of these rules to a particular case.

Stealing is an evil and a crime, unhappily too common in all communities. It is an injury to individuals, and an offence against society. Theft is one of the recognized evils which it is the duty and interest of us all to overcome. But it is to be overcome *with good*, not with evil.

A man who has lost property by theft sometimes knows the thief, and knows where *he* possesses property of equal value, honestly acquired, and rightfully belonging to him. Shall the plundered person steal that, and thus restore the disturbed equilibrium of property? This might compensate for the loss, but would it remove the evil? Is it a right method of proceeding?

Nobody will say so. Instead of removing the evil, it has doubled the evil. If one theft is an offence against good morals and the welfare of society, two thefts must be yet more so. This is not the proper mode of proceeding. Nobody

uses it, nobody would justify it. On the contrary, it is the interest of the person robbed, and of the whole community, to pay a sacred regard to the laws of property, and to show, by their whole conduct, that they respect and scrupulously observe those rights which the thief has violated. Only thus can they justify themselves in complaining of him, and applying remedial measures to him, as a thief. If they show themselves dishonest in the very case in question, with what face can they accuse *him* of dishonesty?

The case of professional depredators, who defy, instead of merely evading, justice, who live entirely by plunder, and none of whose possessions are rightfully their own, I consider to be different from that above supposed. Thus, Gil Blas, confined in the robbers' cave, where all the stores, of every description, were the avails of plunder, if unable to find his own particular property when an opportunity of escape offered, might very properly take, and carry away, its equivalent in any form. So much is his due; the taking of so much, in any form, is no violation of any right, moral or legal, of the robbers; and no right of *any one* is infringed by it. Until he finds the original owner, the substitute thus taken is his, more than any person's in the world. And it is brought nearer to the original owner by being taken out of the custody of the robbers.

In cases of what the law terms "confusion of goods," as where a person, with fraudulent intent, mixes another's property with his own, in such a manner that the portions belonging to each cannot be distinguished, (as money, flour, corn, hay, &c.,) *equity* would of course decide that the person wronged might take his fair proportion of the whole, if he knew what that proportion was. In cases, however, where this last point is doubtful, *the law* goes still further, making the following emphatic decision:

"If the articles were of different value or quality, and the original value not to be distinguished, the party injured takes the whole. It is for the party guilty of the fraud to distinguish his own property satisfactorily, or lose it. No court of justice is bound to make the discrimination for him."—[See Kent's Commentaries, Vol. II., p. 454, where numerous authorities are quoted.]

Returning now to the case of theft which I first supposed, what I wish to have noted in it is this fact, namely; that, in proceeding against the thief—(unhappily and unjustifiably, the

custom of the community is to proceed *against* \* him, instead of applying to him the law of love!) — we ourselves set the example of a faithful adherence to the laws of property, and do not at all pretend that his prior commission of the offence in question justifies *us* in committing it.

Suppose, instead of a theft, that the offence committed is an assault. A man strikes me, wounds me! Perhaps his aspect gives good reason for the supposition that he means to kill me! What am I to do?

This man appears to be an enemy! He certainly acts like one! Under the circumstances, I must consider and treat him as an enemy.

\* The true way of looking at theft is to recognize the fact, that here has been a loss, not only of property, but of integrity; not of a watch or a purse only, but of a *man*. The property stolen should, if possible, be restored to the owner; but it is of even more importance, that the culprit should be restored to honesty, and that he should really be transformed from a malefactor to a benefactor. Hitherto, society has contented itself with providing, by the coarsest appliances of material force, that he who stole shall steal no more for three months, or six months, or a year, but, instead of this, that for the same brief period he should be compelled to labor, working with his hands the thing which is good. If in any cases it has done more than this, it has been merely the appointment of a parson \* to exhort the prisoners, and the permission that volunteer teachers (usually with no qualification but good will) might give them Sunday School instruction.

But these things are far from filling up the measure of our duties, either to the culprit or to the community. The culprit himself—he is our brother, the child of our Father, is he not?—has real and important claims upon us. For him, as for the rest of the population, we have made some classes of provision; as, of a Poor-house, where he may be nourished, if destitute; a Common School, where he may receive some instruction; a Hospital, where his body may be cared for, if it becomes diseased; and an Asylum, where his reason may be restored, against his will, if necessary, when *that* becomes diseased. Is it not of equal consequence that help, and a place of help, should be provided for his moral nature, when *that* is manifestly diseased? And will it not be as great an advantage to the community as to himself if, through the operation of a system established for this end, and wisely adapted to it, this thief can be thoroughly reformed, and restored to the community as a useful citizen? If this can be done, it will be an advantage equal to the very greatest now enjoyed in civilization, securing the progressive diminution of all crime, and the cultivation, far more thoroughly than at present, of good morals and true religion. But no man can say that this is impossible, until it has been tried. It has never been fairly tried!

Some suggestions upon this subject may be found in an essay, hereafter to be published, entitled — “Non-Resistance, applied to the Internal Defence of a Community.”

\* It is said, that a convict in the Massachusetts State Prison once protested against going to the prison chapel on Sunday, saying that the law forbade all “cruel and unusual punishments”; that he had been legally sentenced to hard labor for a term of years, and was willing to submit to it; but that he had not been sentenced to hear Mr. — preach!

What is the treatment in question, according to my rule, heretofore given?

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES!

Again: he has done me a wrong. He has no right to kill, or to wound, or even to strike me. This is not brotherly treatment. Besides, who knows how far his enmity, or passion, may carry him? This is clearly a case for self-defence!

Shall I kill him — wound him — strike him?

What! do to him the very thing which I censure in his conduct to me? Perpetrate a second wrong by way of redressing the first? Show that I am as ready to commit violence as he, when my supposed advantage requires it?

Am I not, then, to defend myself at all?

Yes! self-defence is right, but let us not deceive ourselves by a wrong use of language. To kill, to wound, and to strike, are acts of offence even more than of defence. I will save myself from harm, if I can do so by any right means, but to strike the striker would be like stealing from the thief, a repetition of the wrong act, a casting out Satan by Satan.

Let us look again at the rule!

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD!

I remember, too, that one of the venerated teachers who have written on this subject, as if in reply to the question whether the general rule admitted of any exception, gave his precept in this emphatic negative form, namely:

*"See that none render evil for evil to any man!"*

My rule, then, the rule which I recognize as the best I can possibly conceive of, requires me to use none but *good* means, *right* means, to overcome evil.

If a calm and friendly aspect, an inquiry why such an assault is committed, and an appeal to reason and justice, without either passion or retaliation, will avail to calm the passion of my antagonist, and make him explain, apologize, and offer satisfaction, this is the best possible termination of the affair. "If he shall hear thee, *thou hast gained thy brother.*" I will by all means try this method first. It may be that I shall, by this simple and easy method, transform an enemy into a friend; a work which the whole police of the city, backed by the army and navy of the United States, could not accomplish. This, manifestly, is the *first* thing to be tried. Moreover, this would certainly be successful in a large number of cases which are now prolonged and made more bitter by vio-

lence and retaliation. Is it not true that "A soft answer turneth away wrath"? and also, that "Grievous words stir up anger"?

In cases where this does not succeed, but where the violence of my assailant is continued or increased, I have to decide on the spot whether it will be better for me and my brother (I must try not to lose sight of his welfare, however regardless he may be of mine) to bear with perfect quietness whatever his passion may inflict—in the hope that, when passion has subsided, he will see, repent of, and acknowledge his injustice—or to use my strength to restrain him without injuring him. If I adopt the former of these two methods, if I bear his insults and assaults with a patience manifestly proceeding not from fear or meanness of spirit, but from goodwill to him and conscientious self-control, and if this course produces the desired effect, and he comes to me on the morrow to acknowledge his fault, and offer reparation, this is the second best possible termination of the affair. Again, I shall have *gained my brother!* And that man will be, ever after, more likely to befriend me, and more likely to control himself, than if I had returned his injurious treatment. Moreover, as in the case before supposed, I am sure that this method would succeed in a certain proportion of cases. God's arrangement for mankind is, that wrong-doing should breed self-reproach, and that this should tend to confession and amendment. I will trust to God's arrangement!

On the other hand, if my bodily strength is sufficient, and I judge it best to use *that* in self-defence—grasping my opponent, and, without injuring him, holding him so that he cannot injure me—this method also is at my option. The right of self-defence is unquestionable, and circumstances may show this to be the best way of using it. And if, while I thus prove to my opponent my physical superiority, my language and demeanor, manly and yet friendly, can show him his fault, and make him sincerely regret it, this is the third best possible termination of the affair. Again, I have gained my brother!

Suppose, finally, that all these methods fail to preserve me, as they all sometimes will fail; for Non-Resistance must often receive the cross before the crown, and triumph only through suffering, and the followers of Jesus and Paul, in this heavenly path, will still sometimes meet with foes as



powerful and unrelenting as theirs; if all these resources fail, and I am killed on the spot, what then? Have I erred, have I acted foolishly, have I thrown my life away by refraining from the return of injurious violence upon my adversary? I do not think so: but let us deliberately look at it, and see the balance of advantage and disadvantage.

For me, the most important thing in the whole world is *to be in the right!* I have certain duties to wife, children, friends, enemies, and society, which are to be attended to *in their turn*; but my first and most essential duty is to keep my own heart and life in conformity with the great law of God, which I have above described as Christianity. This law, as I have said, prescribes love as the invariable rule and motive of action; it requires, generally, the avoidance of injury to others, and requires particularly and emphatically the avoidance of injury to *enemies*. Even if I die in carrying out this rule, I have gained the first and most important point, and I die in the path of duty, leaving behind me a noble, not a shameful, example.

In the next place, this duty to myself precisely coincides with my duty to the enemy with whom I am immediately concerned. He is one who eminently needs precisely this lesson, the knowledge that there is such a thing as a practical recognition of duty as more important than bodily safety, or even the continuance of this mortal life. If he has held the opinion attributed to Satan in the old fable — “All that a man hath will he give for his life” — he has now seen his mistake. If he has formerly heard me express allegiance to the principle of Christian love for all men, even for enemies, or if he has known that I try to live in accordance with it, he now knows this allegiance to be real, not assumed. He has put himself more than ever in the wrong. He can hardly fail to see that I have been wholly in the right. If these circumstances make so deep an impression as to convict him of sin, to show him the path of duty, and to lead him heartily to embrace it, again I have *gained my brother*. This certainly is worth dying for.

If this best result does not happen, still I have faithfully adhered to my own principles, and have left on record this testimony, the strongest I could possibly give in favor of the Christian rule, that I chose to die rather than violate it.

Now let us look at the other supposition,

If I save my own life by killing my assailant, in the first place, I sacrifice my rule, the great, glorious, divine rule of love. I desert my colors! I violate, for my mere bodily safety, the great principle which I have upheld and praised as immeasurably more important than bodily safety or temporal interests of any kind. This position is neither a pleasant nor a satisfactory one.

In the next place, neither is it satisfactory to say, as my explanation of the transaction to the public, and to other individuals concerned — "I killed him because he was so wicked as to try to kill me!" If the mere attempt to kill me showed wickedness in him, what character does the actual killing of him show in me?

In the third place, I have taken the responsibility, merely to protect my bodily and temporal interests, of violently thrusting my brother out of the sphere of action in which our Father had placed him, out of the reach of those influences and that moral discipline which God has plainly designed for the treatment and development of men in this stage of their existence. Our Father's house has many mansions, and He, no doubt, will take good care of this, his erring child; but who am I, that I should expel my brother from the school where our Father placed us both? It is for the Power that placed us here to decide how long we shall remain! I have rashly and wrongfully assumed an authority which was never committed to me!

Finally, let us look at the consequences, the carrying out into other particulars, of the principle upon which I have acted. If homicide is unjustifiable only when wanton and entirely unprovoked, and if some sorts of provocation shall be deemed to justify it, where shall the line be drawn? If I may commit it to save my life, may I also commit it to save my character — my reputation — my fortune — the interests of my political party — the interests of my religious sect? If for my individual life this act may be done, may it not be done to help forward a great principle? — the cause of God — the cause of humanity — the cause of Protestantism — the cause of liberty — may I not, for the sake of such great interests as these, smite him who imperils them under the fifth rib? If I can cut short a career so pernicious as that of James Buchanan or of Louis Napoleon, by sudden execution, may I not do it? If I may do it by club, or sword, or pistol, may I not do it by poison?

There is no end to these questions! No end to the supposition of cases in which great good may be done if we are to be allowed to do it by violent and evil means. The only way is to say to such insinuations—"Get thee behind me, Satan!" The only way is utterly, positively and invariably to refuse to do evil, with whatever plausibility it be offered to us as the means of accomplishing good!

Among those statements in the Declaration of Independence which Mr. Choate styled "glittering generalities," is the claim that the right to life is one of the *inalienable* rights of man. It appears that the signers of that document did not thoroughly comprehend the force of their own words, since they proceeded to a long and bloody war, and afterwards established death as the legal penalty for various crimes—to our cost, who are now suffering great and numerous evils as the consequence of both these errors on their part. Their statement, in that great historical document, was juster than their practice. "They builded better than they knew." The life of man is inviolable.

Just as the slaveholder's claim of property in a black man is shown to be absurd and ridiculous by the fact that the black man's hands, and feet, and head, having been born parts of him, *necessarily* belong to him, and cannot *possibly* become the property of another rather than of himself—so the claim of a right to take the life of a man, whether made by the community or by another individual, becomes absurd and preposterous in view of the fact that *God* gave him his life, and that the taking of it by another is a presumptuous interference with God's appointment and God's prerogative. No man has, or can possibly acquire, the right to take the life of another.

But the Christian doctrine of love goes further than this. No man has, or can possibly acquire, the right to *injure* another. To prevent or to repel injury, by uninjurious means, is our right and our duty; but we are not to cast out Satan by Satan. The history of the world overflows with evidences of the *folly* of attempting this; gaining, sometimes, a temporary and partial measure of success, it always fails in the long run. But even success is not the measure of duty; and the Christian rule stamps intentional injury as invariably wrong; our overcoming of evil is to be, *invariably*, an overcoming *with good*!

I am aware, however, that the inquiries which I am attempting to answer have a benevolent, not a selfish object. In making these inquiries, the doubter is not thinking mainly of his individual safety, but of the extent to which he may proceed in helping the weak and oppressed. I must therefore make particular reference to the case of the defence of others, who have general or special claims upon me.

Besides the general obligation which rests upon me to love all men, and to help such needy ones as I can help, I have certain special obligations. My wife and my children have particular and emphatic claims to protection from all injury that I can avert. And, since I am one of a very small minority in this country who recognize the rights of four millions of slaves, and earnestly wish to restore those rights, and feel bound to *interfere* for their restoration by active and efficient help, these circumstances give the slaves also a special and emphatic claim upon me. What effect is my Non-Resistance to have upon the protection of these parties? Will their necessities, their danger or suffering, be good ground for a modification of, or an exception to, or a temporary departure from, my Christian principles?

Let me test this matter by proceeding at once to the strongest possible case, an injury threatened to my wife; my dearer and better self, to whose protection I am bound even more by present love than by the long-standing compact under which I promised her protection.

Of course, *all I can do* shall be done for her safety. My strength, my life, shall interpose between her and harm, and he who would assail her must pass over my body. It is the duty of us both to *suffer* wrong rather than *do* wrong, but I, as the stronger, choose to take upon myself the suffering for both. I shall meet the violence of the assailant as I did in the former case, but, while my life lasts, the assault must be made upon me, not upon my wife. She is to be safe while I live. So far all is plain. But may I, fearing lest the sacrifice of my life be not sufficient to avert the threatened injury, may I proceed to kill the assailant? Doing for my wife what I am conscious that the Christian law forbids me to do for myself! committing an injury to prevent the commission of an injury!

I have said above, that the rules of right and wrong, the principles of morality and religion, remain quite undisturbed

by our private exigency, and that such exigency does not at all release us from obedience to them. I have said, further, that the Christian rule of love to all, even the injurer — and of invariable abstinence from injury on our own part — and of the use of good only, never of evil, in the work of overcoming evil — is the best rule I know, or can possibly conceive of. And, finally, I have admitted that this rule, though best, incomparably best, on the whole, does not in all cases secure the bodily safety of him who practises it.

It would seem that the question is already answered. Shall I demand, in the case of my wife, a different rule of action from that which God has appointed for the whole human race, which he has so appointed because it is the best possible rule, and which I myself have recognized as the best possible rule, both for the whole and for every individual?

My wife and I constitute (perhaps) one five-hundred-millionth part of the human race. No possible injury can be threatened to, or inflicted upon us, which was not recognized and contemplated in that system by which God governs the race, and in that system also by which He has appointed that they shall govern themselves, namely, the Christian system. No possible injury can be inflicted upon us which has not already been inflicted in thousands of other instances, without occasioning, or requiring, any change in the rule. Who are we, that we should rebel against it? Who are we, that we should demand to be better protected, more thoroughly cared for, than the rest of mankind? that we should demand a better destiny than that afforded us in God's world, and under his law?

Is there not a sound, a just, a grand meaning in that saying of the great Teacher, that a man may lose his life by saving it, and may save his life by losing it?

To me it seems plain, that the true safety and interest, both of me and my wife, lie in placing ourselves, and in keeping ourselves, in conformity and coöperation with this great Christian law, and in trusting the consequences of such conformity to Him who made the law.

But it is not merely the "higher law" which points in this direction. Let me descend to the region where my opponents in this debate have (as they think) their stronghold, the ground of present success and bodily safety, and see if they have that realm wholly on their side.

What says the voice of history? What says the applause of men, in regard to those who have disdained to purchase the bodily safety and temporal interests of their nearest and dearest by a violation of duty? What made Mrs. Hemans select for the subject of her beautiful dramatic poem (The Siege of Valencia) one of two instances which the history of Spain records, in which a Christian knight refused to surrender the city which had been given him to defend, even when the Moorish besiegers made the lives of his captive children the price of his fidelity? Was it not because men had honored his fidelity as glorious, even at the cost of such a sacrifice? What made Miss Edgeworth describe the wife of Vivian as saying—when he had abandoned his principles and his honor to regain her lost fortune—“And you *did* consider me? And that *did* weigh with you? Oh! that is what I dreaded most!” cried lady Sarah. “When will you know my real character? When will you have confidence in your wife? What pain can be so great to me as the thought of my husband’s reputation suffering abasement?”

*My* wife is not less noble in soul than Vivian’s. She, too, would scorn to be protected at the sacrifice of my principles—of the rule of right—of the law which our common Father, having made for all His children, must be supposed to have intended for her also. We will together take the risk of abiding by that law.

Then—to glance, in passing, at the results of the opposite course of action—would that course absolutely insure us success? Does violence in defence always conquer violence in offence? Do they that take the sword for what are called good reasons—that is, because they are assailed—never perish by the sword?

I come, lastly, to the case of the slaves! a case, certainly, of great urgency, of the very highest importance, appealing, in the most moving manner, to our humanity, to our sense of justice, and also to our self-interest, since the whirlpool that has engulfed the slave is also, year by year, drawing more and more of *our* rights and interests into its pernicious vortex.

That natural instinct which prompts us to defend ourselves from injury, and those reasons which make clear our *right* to use all means accordant with the law of love for this object, apply equally to the giving of aid to a suffering or oppressed neighbor. We are not at liberty to refuse any aid

which he asks, and which is within our power to give. And, if the case be one of such extreme urgency that he cannot even ask, if he be imprisoned unjustly in a dungeon, or fenced so securely within certain bounds that a tyrant has prescribed, that his voice cannot reach those disposed to help him, so much the more should help be given; in a case like that, the right is clear for any human being to interpose between the oppressor and the sufferer, to demand for him his rights, to help him in the attainment of them, and to obstruct those measures of the tyrant which would prevent his attainment of them. This is one of the very purposes for which strength of body and strength of will were given us; and the possession of these qualities is the condemnation of him who refuses to use them for such a purpose. Well sang one of the poets of freedom —

“Men! whose boast it is that ye  
Come of fathers brave and free,  
If there breathe on earth a slave,  
Are ye truly free and brave?  
If ye do not feel the chain,  
When it works a brother's pain,  
Are ye not base slaves indeed —  
Slaves unworthy to be freed?”

All the circumstances of the case make manifest this right of any third party, any individual, or any community, to interfere with the slaveholder for the relief of the slave. If the Good Samaritan had met the robbers in the act of attacking their victim, and had been able to prevent, or to cut short, their outrage, should he not have done it? The necessities of the traveller were the same, the right of the Samaritan to help was the same, as when the help was ultimately given. The robbers, *as robbers*, had no rights whatever. The function of robbery is evil from beginning to end, it has no right to exist on the earth, and they who exercise it are, so far, utterly and entirely in the wrong. It would have been absurd in the extreme for the robbers, in such a case, to have said to the Good Samaritan — “What right have you to interfere with us?” — Every body had a right to interfere with them.

Is it needful to say so plain a thing as that the traveller was under no obligation to the robbers, *as robbers*? that no duty required him to deliver up his property to them, or to

submit, in any manner or degree, to their injustice? that he owed no duty of submission to them whatever?

Alas! yes! In the circumstances of our country, considering the sort, and the amount, and the presumptuous arrogance, of the oppression which we practise — considering the position held by our national government in support of it — and considering the complicity openly maintained with it by our religious teachers — it is needful to affirm, and to maintain, a thing so obviously true as this.

The slave is one who has been stolen — either at his birth or at some subsequent period — from that natural liberty which is the right of every human being, and which the American Declaration of Independence declares to be inalienable. If he was thus stolen at birth, he was also stolen from the natural right of his mother to protect him, to educate him, and to make arrangements for his future welfare. The whole course of discipline under which he is placed, however varied (perhaps) by capricious indulgence from time to time, is a course of injustice. His relation of plundered person neither imposes, nor includes, the slightest obligation or duty to the plunderer.

On the other hand, the slaveholder is a robber. His claim of property in the body and soul of a brother man is grossly and impudently false, his enforcement of that claim is utterly unjust, and all the means by which he enforces it are shameful and wicked. His hold upon his victim, alike when he was first seized (whether at the birth of the victim or at any subsequent time, and by whatever means he has come in possession of his victim) and at every moment of his continued detention, is an outrage. He has no just claim upon the brother man whom he calls a slave, no right over him, no right to prevent his taking his natural liberty at any moment, no right to prevent, or object to, or complain of, the help which any humane person may give him. And no labor, or service, or duty, is due from the person thus robbed to the robber.

But, still further, the slaveholder, like every other sort of robber, is a dangerous person in the community. He is injuring *its* interests, not less than the interests of his particular victims. He is spreading false principles, helping to break down morality and religion, obstructing honest industry, and freedom of speech and of the press, infringing upon the rights



even of those whom he admits to be free men and fellow-citizens, and doing all this by a series of overt acts manifestly prejudicial to his immediate neighbors and to the community. The slaveholder, then, as such, is a public nuisance; a nuisance such as it is the first duty of any properly constituted government to abate; a person dangerous to the community, who, if he perseveres in this attitude, should be taken in charge by the police, and put under restraint.

But, unfortunately, all governments are neither properly constituted nor well regulated. In fact, there are in the world, even now, more specimens of governments grossly tyrannical and unjust, than of those which rightly perform their proper function. We have then to consider whether—when a government obviously and grossly neglects its function of removing public nuisances, and preserving the rights of quiet and honest men—individuals may not, to the extent of their ability and opportunity, and in the use of right means, kept within a right sphere of operation, (each individual being his own judge in regard to all these,) do those things which the government has criminally neglected?

Suppose, for instance, that in the region between Jerusalem and Jericho, in the life-time of Jesus, an organized band of robbers had become so powerful as not only to work their will throughout that country, but even to have bribed the local government to permit and favor their depredations! Would this fact have made the slightest difference in the right of the Good Samaritan to help the traveller after he had been plundered, or to defend him if he had been present at the time of the assault? Would such a state of things have given the robbers, in the slightest manner or degree, a right to rob, or imposed upon the traveller the slightest duty of consenting to be robbed, or interfered with the absolute right of any third person to help the victim? I assume that it would not! I assume that the right of help, inherent in every human being, is not so forfeited by the appointment of a particular official helper, that others must remain quiet and inactive in the cases where he chooses to neglect his duty! I assume that Florence Nightingale was right in breaking down the door of the arsenal at Scutari! I assume that any man has the right to help any slave to his freedom, entirely irrespective of the fact that in this country the great gang of robbers called slaveholders have secured the complicity of the government in their depredations!

I have come, then, to these conclusions :

THE SLAVEHOLDER HAS NO RIGHTS WHATEVER OVER THE SLAVE.

THE SLAVE, *as such*, OWES NO DUTY OR SERVICE WHATEVER TO THE SLAVEHOLDER.

Help to the slave in the recovery of his freedom is a thing which THE SLAVE HAS A RIGHT TO RECEIVE, WHICH EVERY THIRD PERSON HAS A RIGHT TO GIVE, AND WHICH IS NO WRONG OR INJUSTICE TO THE SLAVEHOLDER, WHETHER IT BE GIVEN SECRETLY OR OPENLY.

I have said that the slave, *as such*, owes no duty or service to the slaveholder.

This is perfectly true. But both the slave and the master are human beings, and, in that capacity, each has duties to the other ; each is bound to practise towards the other the law of love ; the great and glorious law which God has appointed to regulate the intercourse of all men with each other.

Unfortunately, and most culpably, the master ignores, disregards and tramples under his feet the law of love. So much the worse for him. But the wrong-doing of the master to the slave does not in the slightest degree release the slave from *his* duties to God, and his obligation to obey God's law of love. The slave has duties to perform as well as rights to vindicate. God calls upon him, as well as upon other men, to forgive his enemies ; to *love* his enemies ; to return good for evil ; and to overcome evil *with good*.

These are hard duties. They are hard for all of us. Even we, educated, cultivated people, of the privileged class, with so little injustice to undergo, with such ample means of knowing our duty, and with such strong incitements to perform it, how hard do we find it to exercise due forbearance, under the trivial specimens of injury that we meet with ! How few of us, in the course of our whole lives, have met even once with an injury equivalent to the infliction of thirty-nine lashes with a cow-hide, upon the bare back, bringing blood at every stroke ! It is a great deal to ask of the slave that he forgive *his* enemies ; the slaveholder, who sold away his wife, and yet constantly told his Northern visitors, after this, as well as before, that he was well treated, happy and contented ; the slaveholder's son, who ravished his daughter ; the overseer, who has flogged him, kicked and cuffed him, laughed

his manifold miseries to scorn, treated him worse than a dog; and the pro-slavery parson, who, knowing all these things, has kept on repeating to him the infamous lie that *God* has appointed him to this condition, and that *God* requires him to do faithful service to the villain who has robbed him of every thing; it must be very hard to fulfil the duty of forgiveness to these, or to return good for their evil. Nevertheless, such is *God's* command! such is the duty of the enslaved man! and such, also, is his interest, for it is his interest to be entirely and absolutely in the right.

How is the slave to return good for the slaveholder's evil? So destitute, so impoverished is his condition, so limited are his means, that I see but one way in which he can do this; but one positive action by which he can contribute to the real welfare of the slaveholder. Happily, that one way is precisely coincident with the right path of duty towards himself.

His first duty of good-will to the slaveholder is utterly to refuse any longer to be a slave! to put a stop, by this unchangeable determination, and by prompt action in accordance with it, to a relation in which the slaveholder was sinking himself deeper and deeper in sin and in manifold evil.

I do not consider "Uncle Tom" to be *the highest* type, either of the manly character or the Christian character, in the relation he bore to various slaveholders. I would not be understood as making unreasonable demands upon those poor, ignorant, oppressed, cheated and humbugged creatures; it is much, if, like Uncle Tom, they refrain from stealing, lying, drunkenness and lust, in all which things their masters are constantly setting them evil examples; and from hypocrisy, such as they see to be practised by their masters' ministers, which would perhaps gain them some indulgence; it is much if, like him, with heroic self-control, they can subdue the natural desire for vengeance, can rise above wrath and passion, and sincerely pray for those who persecute and despitefully use them. But there is another duty, of not less importance, to be performed by the true man, the true Christian, who is claimed as a slave.

Quiet, continuous submission to enslavement is complicity with the slaveholder. It is acquiescence in the double injustice he is doing, both to himself and to the slave. It is the duty of a man and a Christian not only to protest against

this, but, if he is able, acting in the right way, to put a stop to it. The slave *is* able to put a stop to it, and to do this in the right way, by utterly refusing to be a slave; by showing himself a man, and taking possession of a man's rights. This, then, is his duty, alike to himself and to the slaveholder. And circumstances must decide whether this duty shall be performed in the most satisfactory manner, by a firm, manly, open declaration made to the face of the slaveholder, or by the attempt to escape. Such is the duty of the slave, as I regard it.

But the slave is poor, ignorant, weak, uncultured, unable to combine with his fellow-slaves, or take counsel with more intelligent persons as to the best course of action. He is hemmed in on every side with restrictions, doubts and dangers. He has been, thus far, the most helpless of human beings; to our unspeakable disgrace, who have been living, not only in the same country with him, but in formal alliance with his tyrants. This ought not so to be. The slave must have help, and *we* must help him!

*How* are we to help him? Of course, by using our courage and energy, our strength of body and mind, our wealth, our intelligence, our Christian principle, and our various means of combination and action, *to do the right thing, IN THE RIGHT MANNER.* To set the slave free, or help him to set himself free, by means accordant with our duty and his duty; that is to say, by means accordant with the Christian law of love!

If in any place the slaveholders are such, and the slaves such, and the numbers and character of the interposing freemen such, that a new arrangement can be made, giving the slaves their rights without banishing them from their native soil, leaving them thenceforth free, and in the enjoyment of such rights and opportunities as white freemen have in the Northern States, with a friendly and helpful disposition towards them on the part of the white population, (such as was actually realized in Antigua and Bermuda after the immediate emancipation of the slaves there, in 1834,) this would be the very best possible result. This would fulfil our highest wishes, and afford a rational expectation of permanent prosperity and happiness. Unfortunately, however, the vicious and brutal characters, and the insolent and domineering habits, of the slaveholders and their parasites, place this best solution of the trouble almost out of the bounds of possibility.

If, in failure of this method, the thing could be accomplished which John Brown sought to do, *without the resort to violent and bloody means by which he proposed to maintain it against the resistance of the slaveholders*, namely: if places of secure resort, well stored with provisions, could be established among the mountains of the slaveholding States, to which the slaves could repair and hold themselves safely entrenched, giving shelter to all fugitives, and in a short time draining the whole region of the entire laboring population, and leaving it so deserted until the proprietors of the land were willing to obtain laborers by treating them justly and paying them fair wages — this would be the next best solution of the difficulty; a solution infinitely preferable to a quiet continuance of the slaves in slavery. In such a movement, the slaves should of course take possession of food and clothing, or the means of obtaining them, sufficient to supply both their immediate and prospective necessities, both at the commencement of the movement and during its continuance; for these things, and much more, *are their property*, the avails of their unpaid labor. In a slaveholding country, in my judgment, the movable property, *as a general rule*, may be assumed rightfully to belong to the slaves; but, *at the very least*, the two descriptions of property named above, falling far short of their just claims, might rightfully and undoubtedly be taken to any extent required by their present and prospective needs. In their case, unquestionably, the “confusion of goods” above referred to has been made by the act of the slaveholders, and made fraudulently, for the pecuniary advantage of the slaveholders. In counselling, therefore, that the slaves may take, for the supply of their necessities, the small proportion specified of the property fraudulently intermixed and “confused” by their masters, I have kept far within, not only the bounds of equity, but the settled decisions of “white” law.

If also it be necessary, in accomplishing such a movement, to seize and put under restraint, by uninjurious means, the persons of any slaveholders, until the departure of the slaves is safely effected, this would be perfectly right, for it is only what the government ought long since to have done. A slaveholder is a public nuisance; a person eminently dangerous to the community; and if the government does not do its duty in restraining him, any person who has the power may properly use all uninjurious means to do it.

In failure of these two methods, the next best thing to be done is to help as many slaves as possible to a safe removal from the land of bondage to some place of freedom. To inform them, as extensively as possible, of the existence of white friends and helpers, to give all needed material aid, with counsel and direction, and the personal superintendence of sympathizing freemen, where that shall seem best; to demand the slave's rights and effect his rescue by calmly and openly confronting the slaveholder, when success will not be hazarded thereby; otherwise, to use all needful secrecy; to protect the slave in some of the States called *free*, where that can be done, and to work diligently towards increasing the number of such truly free places; to enlarge, and extend, and multiply operations of this sort in all accessible parts of the slave region, making these movements a serious and constantly increasing check upon the impunity which slaveholders have hitherto enjoyed; by faithful inculcation of anti-slavery truth in the North, to increase the number and strengthen the confidence of such sympathizers; and finally, by using the greatest care, in all these movements, to keep the slaves and their friends absolutely and entirely in the right, leaving the wrong where it now is, absolutely, entirely and exclusively on the side of the slaveholders.

Is it said that, in transactions like these, or as the result of them, violence would be sure to come? Is it asked what those persons shall do who, beginning a right work by uninjurious means, are assailed in the prosecution of it with violence and injury?

I answer, they are to do just what a Christian, one who believes in and endeavors to live by the great law of love, is to do in any other case where he is met by violence and injury! He is first, and above all, to *keep himself in the right*. He is to accomplish what good he can by right means, to leave undone for the present all that he can *not* do by right means, and to bear with fortitude, and without losing the spirit of love, or departing from the manifestation of love, whatever evil may befall him.